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The Art of Dying Well

“Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years. But God said, ‘Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.’” Luke 12:19–20

QUESTION. Since no man has one day’s certainty of his life, what may we do to be secured from being surprised by death?

ANSWER. 1. Sit loose from the world so that you may be able to pack up and be gone upon sudden warning. Here was the folly and misery of this rich man, that he has set his heart upon the world; his mind ran upon his barns and upon his belly; his goods were his gods. He wished no other felicity than to eat and be merry. If you would be fit for your great journey to your long home you must “lay aside every weight” and, in special, the encumbering, entangling, and ensnaring clog and burden of worldly affections. You must take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, drunkenness, and the cares of this life if you would not have that day come upon you unawares. It is said that there is a fish whose heart is in his belly; would that there were no such monsters among men! Certainly that man whose heart is in his belly, or on his coffer, who idolizes his friends or his reputation, is no more fit for the assaults of death than the unhappy Trojans buried in sleep and wine for the invasion of the well-appointed Greeks; or the secure Laish for the subtle Danites; or the Shechemites, when sore and unwieldy, for the sons of violence and instruments of cruelty. Study to be crucified to the world, to use all earthly comforts in a mortified manner, as those who are

taking their long leave, and let death find you dead beforehand; and then let it come when it will and do its worst.

2. Do not entrench on God's prerogative in carving out the future time. Do not reckon upon hereafter. This was the unhappiness of this rich fool. He counted upon many years. God had given him much goods, and now he is so bold as to cast upon many merry days to spend them. But God is angry at his usurpation; and since he would presume to be his own carver God rebuked his boldness, and showed His prerogative, and cut him short enough: "This night shall thy soul be required." Remember that your times are in God's hands; improve with all possible diligence your present allowance. He gives you wealth to lay up for hereafter, but He keeps your time in His own hands so that you shall not know one day whether you shall ever have another or be allowed to live till the next. Do not cast upon tomorrow. Live this day well. When shall we learn to practice the received lesson, to live every day as if it were our last? Blessed men that we would be if we would but live up to this short rule! Christians, why are our lives so far wide of our rules and principles? Does conscience witness that you live up to this? If the rule is good, why do you not daily study to conform to it? Is it not a shame that a heathen should teach you? "Think," he said, "every morning when you rise, I may never lie down again; and every night you lies down, it may be, I may never rise again; when you go out, I may never return; when you come in, I may never more go out." Christian, let it be your serious thought every morning, "I will spend this day for eternity."

3. Store up in heaven quickly and see that you are rich towards God. It was the want of this that made this rich worldling to be branded a fool. Give alms plentifully and provide for yourselves bags that do not wax old; be sparing as to yourselves but lay out and do not spare upon the service of God. Give yourselves unto prayer; let reading the Word, meditation, and